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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 KABUL 005442

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DEPT FOR SCA/FO DAS GASTRIGHT, SCA/A
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG
NSC FOR HARRIMAN
OSD FOR KIMMETT
CENTCOM FOR CG CFC-A. CG CJTF-76 POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/09/2016
TAGS: [MCAP](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: BOUCHER AND SPANTA ON JIRGAS, MUSA QALA, IRAN AND
STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Classified By: AMBASSADOR RONALD NEUMANN FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

Summary

11. (C) Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs Richard Boucher used his November 8 meeting with Afghan Foreign Minister Spanta in Kabul to draw out Afghan expectations on cross-border jirgas and press for early consultations with Islamabad to bridge differences. Spanta described the overall Afghan security situation as improved. The success of NATO's Operation Medusa in Kandahar had contributed to public confidence. Spanta shares the public's serious concerns about the Musa Qala Agreement and agreed it must be tested to ensure government authority in the area. Spanta acknowledged increased Iranian involvement in Afghanistan over recent months, but underlined its opposition to the Taliban, terrorism and drugs. He urged a peaceful resolution to concerns over Iran's nuclear program. Boucher and Spanta agreed that working groups for the Strategic Partnership will meet over the next two months to hash out substantive issues well before the plenary session scheduled for early next year. Boucher pressed for more aggressive efforts to return Afghan refugees living in Pakistan. Spanta raised possible creation of an Afghan Transparency Commission to end corruption. End summary.

Jirgas: Defining Scope, Composition, and Roles

12. (C) Spanta generally offered the same comments President Karzai and National Security Advisor Rassoul in their later meetings with Assistant Secretary Boucher on the goals, participation, and organization of cross-border jirgas. He expressed relief that President Karzai had named the commission to take on the planning responsibilities, as Spanta had been

spending up to 80 percent of his time on the issue over recent days. Spanta would continue to work with Pakistani Foreign Minister Kasuri and to move the process forward, but the day to day work would fall to the committee.

¶3. (C) Spanta agreed that the jirgas should focus on bringing cross border violence under control and that the participation in both jirgas should be national. "This is not an ethnic problem, it is an Afghan problem," he said. Terrorism is not a border region issue, as it has national implications in both countries. He expressed that the jirgas should be more about discussion than decisions. Boucher reviewed his positive meeting with Ambassadors Durrani and Jawad in Washington and said the U.S. was prepared to actively support the process. As in his meetings with Karzai and Rassoul, Boucher underlined the need for early Afghan-Pakistani discussions to avoid differences in expectations and approach becoming too set.

¶4. (C) Boucher stated that the U.S. is willing to be actively involved, but that it expects Afghanistan and Pakistan to work together constructively to find common ground on key issues. Spanta acknowledged that this could be a challenge for both sides without international involvement.

Overall Afghan-Pak Security Assessment

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¶5. (C) Spanta made the same points National Security Advisor Rassoul made in his meeting with Boucher later that day, including that the overall security situation had improved over recent weeks. Spanta noted it was not entirely clear why, but there have been significant improvements in Kabul, some successes in the southern provinces, and less change in the East. Boucher corrected Spanta's assertion that the number of cross-border attacks had spiked after the signing of the North Waziristan Agreement, noting that they actually had risen significantly when the negotiations began and have not decreased since. He underlined the importance of both Pakistan and Afghanistan committing to quiet diplomacy. Spanta agreed, but said the public expects to see a reaction to provocation and violence. Karzai cannot respond to suicide attacks with silence. The government must, at a minimum, provide services or compensation to the victims to show some form of action.

¶6. (C) Boucher reported on his meeting in Islamabad with President Musharraf, during which there was agreement that it was too early to assess the effects of the North Waziristan Agreement. Boucher noted Musharraf's stated willingness to take military action, if necessary, or change the political parameters to make the agreement stick. He also shared Musharraf's comments that many initially doubted a similar agreement signed by Pakistan regarding the Kashmir border area, but in the long run, there was less infiltration into the area. Boucher said there is recognition that, even if the Waziristan Agreement sticks, activity in Quetta still remains a major problem.

Serious Concerns About Musa Qala

¶7. (C) Spanta expressed "serious concerns" about the possible outcome of the Musa Qala Agreement

between the local shura and Governor Daoud. People in the region who are loyal to the central government reportedly are having problems living, working and doing business there; whereas, those with Taliban sympathies are doing very well and able to move freely throughout the region, Spanta alleged. Spanta asserted there needed to be clarity on "whether the agreement is between NATO and the Taliban or between NATO and tribal and local elders."

18. (C) The Ambassador acknowledged general nervousness about the agreement but pointed out that the idea started with Governor Daoud of Helmand Province. The Ambassador also reminded that Karzai had agreed with General Richards and the British Ambassador that a force of roughly 50-100 police from outside Helmand Province would go down to enforce the agreement. (Note: During the November 8 Policy Action Group meeting, the option of bringing in police from outside was no longer on the table. We are pushing to reinstate the idea. End note.)

19. (C) The Ambassador said that the use of police from outside Helmand would serve as a test with three possible outcomes: (1) the outside force would be able to provide security, making the agreement a success; (2) Taliban may attack the outside police force, possibly leading the locals to weigh in on behalf of the government forces, or (3) local residents might join the Taliban in attacking the forces, making the agreement a failure. The Ambassador stressed the agreement must be tested before any conclusions could be reached. Most important, no other such agreements should be made until the Musa Qala

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arrangement is tested.

10. (C) Spanta reiterated that he considered the Agreement to be a very dangerous game, as it sends the wrong message to the Afghan public. In Afghan culture, when the party in the weaker position is seen to be forced into an agreement with the other side, the stronger side's position is validated. According to Spanta, the Taliban went into the position as the stronger party. It is therefore inevitable that the public will read the agreement as a sign of NATO and Government weakness.

Plans for a Greater U.S. Support

11. (C) Boucher asked Spanta if there were examples of places where a strategy of following successful military operations with security and services had been implemented and successful. Spanta responded with several examples of positive results -- in southern Konar, southern Laghman, northern Paktika, and some parts of Khost, Zabul and Uruzgan. Boucher stressed that the U.S. sees this as an effective strategy and is seeking resources to allow for its implementation to all the major parts of Afghanistan.

12. (C) Boucher outlined the U.S. plan to have larger, more coordinated engagement in Afghanistan, especially from the Afghan National Police. He stressed the need to see increased Afghan efforts regarding governance. Boucher also highlighted EU efforts to put together a seven-year budget for assistance to Afghanistan, including enhanced German and Italian support for the police.

¶13. (C) Boucher said it was unfortunate that the international public viewed engagement in Afghanistan only in military terms. There is little appreciation for efforts in support of governance and development. Boucher said the U.S. is pushing NATO to invest more money in the Provincial Reconstruction Teams and the provinces, in line with the U.S. position that each country with a military component must also participate in development.

Strategic Partnership

¶14. (C) Turning the conversation to the Strategic Partnership, Boucher agreed to Spanta's suggestion that the working groups (dealing with prosperity, governance, security and counter narcotics) should start meeting over the next two months to ensure there is progress on commitments before the next formal meeting after the first of the year. This would allow the plenary sessions to be used to announce progress made. Spanta said the Afghan Foreign Ministry would serve as the face of the strategic partnership in Afghanistan and the "locomotive" driving the process.

Transparency Commission on Corruption, Ethnic Tension

¶15. (C) According to Spanta, the best way to avoid ethnic tensions in Afghanistan is to: (1) clean up corrupt authorities; (2) get participation from all sides; (3) ratify tribal structures; and (4)

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demonstrate national, not ethnic, policies. He noted that one possible instrument on the table is creating a National Transparency Commission with members appointed by Karzai. In closing the discussion on corruption, Spanta expressed his concern that Attorney General Sabit may "create more problems than solutions". Boucher reminded that, "anytime you sweep, you inevitably get some dust in the air."

Refugee Camps

¶16. (C) Boucher raised the issue of refugee camps in Pakistan and urged action to encourage returns, with UN involvement. Spanta mentioned that the onset of winter will make it particularly difficult to move forward in the coming months, but added that, from Afghanistan's perspective, the biggest challenges are support and reintegration of the refugees, dealing with any security issues connected to returnees, and ensuring compliance with the principle that all repatriation be voluntary. Boucher emphasized the importance of closing the camps as expeditiously as possible.

Iran Poised to "Create Distractions" in Afghanistan

¶17. (C) In response to a question from Boucher, Spanta acknowledged increased Iranian involvement in Afghanistan over the last two months. Iran's motive, he said, is to demonstrate its power and ability to "be a distraction" in the region should it be attacked by the U.S. When pressed for specifics on Iran's involvement, Spanta acknowledged that Iran was

increasing its "agent network" to promote anti-American and anti-NATO sentiment in Afghanistan, but also stressed that Iran's activities had no clear link to terrorist groups or planned military activities in Afghanistan. According to Spanta, Iran wants a stable Afghanistan and realizes that the failure of the Taliban is in Iran's interests.

¶18. (C) Regarding Iran's nuclear program, Spanta stressed that Afghanistan is against the idea of a nuclear Iran but cautioned that if there is an escalation of military tensions between the U.S. and Iran, Iran would be likely to increase its activities in Afghanistan. He reiterated how important it is for Afghanistan that the U.S. and Iran resolve the nuclear issue peacefully and diplomatically.

¶19. (U) Assistant Secretary Boucher cleared this cable.
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